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AND

[illegible]Teaching on Eternal Life

T. W. GILBERT

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THE MIRACLES IN ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL
AND
THEIR TEACHING ON ETERNAL LIFE.

The Miracles in St. John's Gospel

AND

Their Teaching on Eternal Life

BY

T. W. GILBERT, B.D.

(Balliol College, Oxford)

Rector of Bradfield, Berks.

With an Introductory Note by

The Lord Bishop of Oxford

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4

55 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND MADRAS

1923

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INTRODUCTORY

I HAVE read these lectures with special interest, for when I was at work in South London I urged members of the C.E.M.S. to demand the Church's help to provide them with instruction in matters of Faith and Church History along the lines of the work done by the Workers' Educational Association. So what we now call Church Tutorial Classes were formed. These lectures then are a happy instance of the valuable work that is being done : they open up in a simple, straightforward way a subject of which too many are, no doubt, wholly unaware : they invite discussion and question : and above all they stimulate the desire to pursue the study of the subject deeper and further. I earnestly hope that this book may encourage others to start classes and to study in this way. In these days with the bewildering output of books (little and big) on innumerable subjects of interest, plain men, who distrust their capacity for study, are perplexed and give up the idea of forming considered opinions in despair ; or else, what is worse, they pick up here and there learning's crumbs, ill-assorted and afterwards ill-digested, and believe they are entitled to give their opinions with astounding emphasis. Such lectures as these and all that they imply by way of common discussion and continuous study show us how we must read and mark and learn if we are to hope to gain and give right judgment in anything.

HUBERT M. OXON.

CUDDESDON.

Feb. 23rd, 1922.

PREFACE

THIS small book contains the substance of a series of lectures given in Oxford under the auspices of the Oxford Diocesan Church Tutorial Classes. The lectures were quite informal in character, more than half the time of the class being taken up with the discussion of various points which arose in the course of the lectures.

Matters of textual criticism, though they do not appear in the lectures, were sometimes raised, but the text of the Revised Version with the marginal readings, was taken as the basis of the work of the Class.

I was able to give the members of the Class an outline of each lecture after it was delivered, and this proved helpful to them in their subsequent study of the Gospel. Requests were made, however, for the publication of the lectures in a permanent form, and the present book is an answer to those requests.

I need only add that I am quite conscious that a study of St. John's Gospel along the lines here undertaken may be open to the criticism that it gives only a partial view. At the same time I am convinced that it does provide a key for the understanding of the Gospel, and I trust that the suggestions may prove helpful to my readers as they were to the members of the first Church Tutorial Class which I had the privilege of conducting in Oxford.

Some articles of a similar character were published by me in *The Churchman* some time ago, and I am grateful to the Editor for permission to reproduce them.

T. W. GILBERT.

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The Miracles in St. John's Gospel and Their Teaching on Eternal Life.

CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

EACH of the books of the New Testament is written with a definite aim. The Epistles of St. Paul for example are letters giving instruction or exhortation on certain matters that called for the Apostle's attention. So he writes the first Epistle to the Thessalonians to explain what will happen in the case of those who " have fallen asleep " before Our Lord's appearing, and he writes the second Epistle to the same people to correct the false deduction which they had made from his first letter. Again, in the Epistle to the Galatians we see the fervid outpouring of the Apostle's fear lest the Jewish Christians should stifle their Christianity by unduly exalting the Jewish law ; whilst in the Epistle to the Philippians we have a letter from the aged Apostle thanking those whom he looks upon as close friends for their practical kindness to him in his hour of need. Now, if the Epistles are primarily letters written with a definite purpose, it is equally true that each of the Gospels was composed with a purpose, and the purpose, so far as the first three Gospels is concerned, is to commend the claims of Christ to certain types of people. St. Mark, for instance, lays very little stress upon the sayings of

Our Lord, and makes little reference to the Old Testament. Rather he lays emphasis upon the works, and not the words, of Christ, and seeks to commend Christ to the Roman people as the wonder-working Divine man. St. Matthew on the contrary, makes constant reference to Old Testament prophecy; he is careful to connect Our Lord with Abraham and David, and the whole atmosphere of the book is to commend Our Lord to the Jews as the long-expected Messiah. So again with St. Luke we are conscious of a different purpose. The emphasis laid by this writer upon parables such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, which he alone records, the prominence given to the call to the Gentiles as in ch. xiii. 28-30, and the importance attached to Our Lord's ministry in Samaria (cf. ix. 51-56, xvii. 11-19), are some of the reasons which make us feel that St. Luke was writing for Gentile readers, and was hoping to commend Christ to the world outside of the Jewish nation. Hence when we come to St. John's Gospel, we expect to find that the writer of this Gospel also had some settled purpose in writing, and the choice of matter which he sets before his readers, and the logical arrangement of his narrative (so different in its way to the contents of the other three Gospels), make the reader feel that St. John is writing with some clearly-defined scheme in his mind. What that scheme is, we see, from the statement in chapter xx. 30, 31, i.e., " Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye may believe

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His Name." In these two verses St. John states that out of all the miracles which Christ performed he has chosen a certain number, and when we examine the Gospel we find that the number chosen is the symbolical and perfect number seven (excluding the post-resurrection miracle described in chapter xxi). Then we notice that St. John refers to the miracles as " signs." In the other books of the New Testament the Greek words which are generally used for the word " miracle " are τέρας* which implies something " wonderful," or δύναμις which suggests that the particular act is one displaying great " power." St. John, however, uses the word †σημεῖον, which means literally " a sign," and the choice of the word emphasises that the particular miracles described by St. John were not only exhibitions of something " wonderful " and demonstrations of great " power," but that they were also " signs " pointing to some great truth.‡ What

*Examples of the use of the word τέρας are seen in Acts ii. 19 ; ii. 43 : of the use of the word δύναμις Acts ii. 22 ; St. Mark ix. 39.

†St. John marks the difference between σημεῖον and τέρας in such a verse as iv. 48, cf. Acts xiv. 3.

‡The following extract from Archbishop Trench's " Notes on the Miracles," p. 7, is helpful in bringing out the differences in the words used by the New Testament writers when referring to Our Lord's miracles, i.e., " The healing of the paralytic (Mark ii. 1-12) was a WONDER, for they who beheld it " were all AMAZED ; " it was a POWER, for the man at Christ's word " arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all " ; it was a SIGN, for it gave token that One greater than men deemed was among them ; it stood in connection with a higher fact of which it was the seal and sign, being wrought that they might " know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins."

that truth is St. John tells us in the two verses referred to. He has chosen these seven signs out of all Christ's miracles he says, and so arranged them in his Gospel " that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God," and the resulting belief in the Divinity of Christ and His Oneness with God which the " signs " produce, will give the further result of the possession of " Life in His Name." Hence our examination of this Gospel will concentrate primarily on each of the seven signs, we shall notice the purpose behind each of the signs and the results flowing therefrom, and so step by step we shall see St. John developing his narrative to the complete acknowledgment of the Divinity of Christ, and to a statement of the Life which belief in Him will bring.

The theme proper of the Gospel begins with the narrative of the first great sign recorded in the second chapter, but for the sake of completeness we must not omit a brief survey of the first chapter. This opening chapter, in a way which is characteristic of Eastern writers, summarises the essential truths which the Gospel is to elaborate and corroborate. In the first verses there is a statement of the eternity of the Word, or *Logos, with God (i. 1-2), and a declaration of the creative power of the Logos (i, 3). To this

*" Logos " is a Greek word which embraces two ideas. First it signifies what is meant by the term " Word " in English, i.e., that which conveys our ideas one to another. The Jewish use would be stronger than this and implies when used of Christ, One who is identical with God, and yet distinct from God, and revealing God to the world. In addition " Logos " meant to Greeks " the voice of reason " or " the ultimate principle of things " and this aspect is also brought out in St. John i. 1-5.

is added that in the Logos was Life (i, 4), thus definitely associating the Logos with God as the fountain of Life " (cf. Psalm xxxvi. 9), and then follows the statement that those who " received " the Logos or " believed on His Name " had the competency* to become " children of God " (i, 12), and so to secure the light of life (i, 4, 5). This section (i. 1—13) therefore is a preliminary statement of St. John's own belief, and a summary of the truth which the rest of the Gospel is to prove.

Following on this introductory statement of the possibility of man entering into a filial relationship with God through believing on the Logos, comes a preliminary affirmation of the same great truth from the lips of John the Baptist. St. John himself had identified the Logos with God (i. 1), the Baptist advances further by linking the Logos with Christ the hope of Israel (i. 18†, i. 23 and the statement of Andrew the disciple of the Baptist i, 41), and enunciates the world-wide significance of Christ the Logos and hope of Israel (i, 29).

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*The Greek word is ἐξούσια which implies not so much " power," as the authorised version renders it, but rather " capacity " or " authority." Hence the truth involved in i. 12 is that those who " receive " the Logos or " believe on His Name," by that act of " receiving " and " believing " have placed themselves in the position where they are at once " the children of God," and so progressively developing the life which they receive as children of God.

†(i. 18) The Authorised and Revised Versions reading is ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός i.e., " the only-begotten son," but many ancient authorities read μονογενὴς θιὸς i.e., " one who is God only-begotten."

After the preliminary statement by St. John and the affirmation by the Baptist, the writer adds certain signs in proof of the same great truths. The dialogue with Peter, for instance (i, 42), reveals the latter's character and future position. This produces the ready obedience of Philip to the simple words: "Follow Me," which is easy of understanding when one remembers the close link between Peter and Philip (i, 44), and this is followed by the identification by Philip of "Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph" with the Messiah or Christ "of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write" (i, 45). This sign is supplemented by that of reading the mind of Nathanael when brooding under the fig-tree (i, 48), and from the lips of the new disciple come the words of which he hardly understood the full meaning, and which by design are recorded here, viz., *"Thou art the Son of God; Thou art King of Israel" (i, 49). It was a statement of the belief which it was the purpose of the writer of the Gospel to achieve, and which only had its fulfilment in the words of St. Thomas later (xx. 28). Hence the significance of the closing words of the

*This expression of Nathanael is a reference primarily to Our Lord as the Messiah, and does not emphasise the Divinity of Christ as the confession of Thomas in xx. 28 does. Dr. Anderson Scott in his book "Dominus Noster," p. 122, says: "The phrase 'Son of God' in its origin goes back to the language of Psalm ii. 7, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,' and owes its primary application to Christ to the Hebrew habit of representing any close relation depending on choice or similarity of character in terms of 'sonship' . . . The title is in effect a synonym for 'Messiah,' embodying the idea that the office involves the Divine choice, the Divine commission, and complete harmony between the bearer of it and God."

opening section, i.e., " Ye shall see the heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man " (i. 51), because these words enunciate the truth stated in the first chapter, and explained and proved throughout the Gospel, viz., that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the Hope of Israel and of the world, that He was indeed one with God the source of Life, and that through Him the possession of Life was possible to all men. Truly, therefore, the heaven was opened, space had become annihilated, for now the aspirations of human hearts could ascend direct to the throne of God, from whom Life was made sure to humanity through the Person of Jesus Christ.

The whole of the Gospel now onward is concerned with showing how this link between earth and heaven became a reality, for St. John proceeds to trace how the signs produced belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and how this belief brought Life.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST SIGN AT CANA

THE first great sign described by St. John in the second chapter takes place in Cana of Galilee, which was a village some four or five miles distant from Nazareth. The fact of the proximity to Nazareth and the presence of Our Lord with His Mother and the disciples as guests at the wedding, make us realise that the occasion was a private gathering of neighbours and friends from the countryside.* No doubt, according to the friendly custom that pertains to scattered country places, and especially in the East, many more guests arrived for the ceremony than were expected. It has been suggested that Our Lord had not been originally invited to the wedding because just prior to this event He had had His meeting with the Baptist. On His return, however, to Nazareth, He " was bidden " with His disciples to the marriage

*Some discussion took place in the class as to how far the disciples would be reliable witnesses in support of the various miracles. There seemed to be a kind of feeling that the eye-witnesses of the miracle at Cana were simple country folk, and therefore easily mistaken or gullible. A short experience of country life renders me very sceptical as to the credulity of country folk ; their minds may be slower to move than the nimble-witted townsman, but they are just as acute and their judgment just as sound. Moreover, the disciples themselves were a very composite body. They included John, who was no simple-minded peasant, but a man of deep philosophic insight ; Matthew, the hard-headed tax-gatherer ; Thomas, the so-called rationalist ; Simon, the zealot or Jewish patriot, etc. They were all hard-headed working men, face to face with the realities of a work-a-day world, and no more likely to be gullible than the average body of working men to-day.

ceremony (ii. 2). The invitation at such short notice brought Christ and His disciples as somewhat unexpected guests, and it was for this reason therefore that the Virgin Mary turned to Our Lord with the statement " They have no wine." Now the distress of the Virgin Mary was not merely due to the implied suggestion that the comparatively unexpected presence of Our Lord and His disciples was likely to cast reflection upon the apparent lack of hospitality on the part of the host. Her distress was due to the association of wine with the wedding ceremonies. Every Jewish bride over whose nuptials the " seven blessings" had not been pronounced was looked upon as unmarried, and these " seven blessings " could not be pronounced in a ceremoniously correct manner except with the use of wine. So the Virgin Mary turns to Christ with the request for help,* and this results in the miracle of the turning of water into wine, the details of which are given in verses 4 to 10.

*Luther and other commentators have suggested that the Virgin Mary had been the witness in the home-life at Nazareth of the wonder-working power of Christ, and hence that her words in ii. 3 are a suggestion that Christ shall obviate the need which had arisen by performing a miracle. The writer of the Gospel, however, definitely refers to the miracle at Cana as " the BEGINNING of His signs " (ii. 11). The remark of the Virgin Mary is no more than the natural turning to her Son as she would have done in a time of trouble at Nazareth, and since the house at Cana was evidently that of a friend, her friend's trouble would be her trouble, and this would be shared with Christ. Moreover, according to Edersheim i. 359 the gift of wine or oil on an occasion such as a marriage " was regarded as a meritorious work of charity," and hence the implied request of the Virgin Mary is easily comprehensible, especially as the shortage of wine had evidently been caused by the arrival, at short notice, of Jesus and His five disciples.

Now the first great truth which emerges from this sign is that it proclaims the Divine power of Our Lord over the natural world. In a miracle of healing there would have been room for ascribing the miracle to the influence of the mind on the body, but since the miracle is performed on an inanimate object, there is no possibility of suggesting any psychic mediation. Therefore this first sign proclaims the great truth that Christ has power over nature, and it is therefore a heralding sign holding up Christ before the eyes of men as the lord of the natural world. Concurrent with this great truth, moreover, went a deeper truth still, and of which the miracle itself was the sign, viz., that in Christ there was a transforming power, and that He was able to change the simpler and lower element into the richer and higher.

The description of this first miracle finishes in ii. 10, and there is no trace of any teaching associated with the miracle at the time of its performance.* The miracle is simply a sign performed amongst the limited circle of family acquaintances and neighbours to impress upon them the superhuman powers which Christ has over the world of nature.† The result was

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*The actual teaching associated with the sign comes in ch. iii. cf. infra pp. 11-15

†The miracle incidentally taught the disciples other lessons, and one of the things which would strike the disciples would be the difference in the attitude of Our Lord to that of John the Baptist with regard to the social joys of life. The disciples at this stage of Our Lord's ministry were five in number, and they had all been disciples of the Baptist, and the difference between the asceticism of the Forerunner and the active association of Christ with the wedding feast must have made a deep impression on them.

significant enough however, so far as the disciples were concerned, i.e., " This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory ; and His disciples believed on Him " (ii. 11). The inaugurating sign had done its work at least for them, for whilst there is no suggestion that the disciples at this stage believed in Christ fully as the Son of God, yet the Greek words imply that they now gave absolute trust to Him Who had proved Himself to be the Lord of nature.

By contrast with this complete trust on the part of the disciples at Cana of Galilee, St. John places the limited belief of the Jews at Jerusalem. In the cleansing of the Temple and in the prediction of the Resurrection, they had a sign, both actual and verbal, of the revelation of Christ as the fulfilment of the hope of Israel (ii. 13—22), whilst the signs performed at Jerusalem during the passover (ii. 23) simply tended to emphasise this revelation. The result was a certain kind of belief on the part of many of the Jews, but a belief of a different quality to that associated with the disciples in ii. 11. The belief which the Jews gave was a belief " on His Name " (ii. 23), a recognition, possibly, of Jesus as the Messiah, but without any deep trust in Him personally, as verses 24 and 25 imply.*

Having proclaimed by the preliminary sign at Cana His power over the world of nature, and having also

*The Greek text brings this out significantly, i.e., πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ . . . Ὁ Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αυτον αὐτοῖς (ii. 23, 24).

secured the personal belief of the disciples and 'the Jews' in their respective degrees, Christ is now shown in chapter iii. directing men to the deeper truth of which the first miracle was a sign.

We notice first of all that Nicodemus is attracted to our Lord by the signs which proclaim to the Jewish ruler that Christ is in some degree a God-sent teacher (iii. 2).* The abruptness of Our Lord's reply (iii. 3) to the salutation of Nicodemus is always a matter of wonder, but when the narrative is read in the light of St. John's carefully arranged plan of writing, the apparently inconsequential nature of Our Lord's reply is at once dissipated. For Our Lord in His opening words goes immediately to the root of the fundamental necessities of man, by enunciating explicitly the truth for which the first sign had prepared the way. Thus in iii. 3 is laid down the prime necessity for mankind that "except a man be born from above he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Christ here states that if a man is to have a nature fit to stand in the Presence of God, then it is necessary to attach his life to a new source, and to transfer the inspiration of his being from earth to heaven. This necessity finds its corroboration in iii. 5. Whatever limitation the alternate interpretation "except a man be born anew," instead of "be born from above," might have, any such limitation is nullified by the unequivocal statement of iii. 5, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

*This attitude of Nicodemus is typical of the attitude of the early Christians towards Jesus and His works, cf. Acts ii. 22 ; x. 38

The first phrase " born of water " would have at least a dual significance, for it referred in the first place to the Jewish " washings " or " baptizings " for the purpose of removing ritual impurity ; and in the second place to the baptism of John, who required repentance and separation from the past as a preliminary to being received into the Kingdom. The phrase, therefore, pointed to the fact that a man must cut himself loose from the ordinary earthly moral standard of life. The second phrase " born of the Spirit " emphasised the necessary corollary to being " born of water." It declared the need for life which has its origin in the Spirit of God, it expresses the necessity for a new mode of being, different from the life which is " born of the flesh." How such a miraculous birth and life—already mentioned i. 12—was possible, is now clearly and definitely stated (iii. 13—16), i.e., the Son of Man who Himself had come " from above " from the Presence of God, had been sent by God Himself that " Whosoever believeth on Him " could " in Him have eternal life."*

This epoch-making statement about One who came from God to be the personal link between God and man, and who secures eternal life for men by belief in

*The idea of being " born again " or " born from above " was not a new idea to Jews, for the phrase was applied to proselytes admitted to Judaism from the Gentile world. To Nicodemus a proselyte would be " born again," because he had entered the Jewish Church, Christ's teaching is that a man must be " born again " BEFORE he can enter the Kingdom of God. Hence arises Nicodemus' difficulty (cf. Edersheim, " Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," i. 383).

Himself, is so striking to St. John that he here interposes the testimony of the Baptist to the truth of the statement and adds some reflections of his own. John the Baptist first lays down in reference to the attractive influence of Christ (iii. 26) that such power on the part of Christ was " given him from heaven " (iii. 27). Verses iii. 31—36 seem to be a composite statement made up of the Baptist's testimony and St. John's own reflections, but the argument runs quite smoothly from the preceding passage. This same Christ, whom the Baptist had declared to be the One whose forerunner he himself was (iii. 38), had come from above (iii. 31). Moreover, because Christ had come from God and was sent into the world by God, He gave expression to the mind of God, and therefore belief in the Son brought with it eternal life (iii. 34—36). The whole is in the nature of a parenthetical statement in support of the stupendous truth unfolded by Christ to Nicodemus.

The interview with Nicodemus had been used by Our Lord to bring out mainly the manward side of the problem how man could secure eternal life (cf. iii. 3, 5) : the interview with the woman of Samaria described in ch. iv. serves to reveal the Godward aspect of the matter. It is quite true that this latter incident contains other important truths ; it reveals our Lord's attitude, for instance, to those who were not Jews, and it proclaims Our Lord's emancipation of women from the narrow and derogatory attitude of the times, by the fact that His first revelation of Himself as the Messiah is given to this despised Samaritan

woman (iv. 26). The broad purpose of the interview, however, is to insist on the position of God in reference to the securing of eternal life by man. Thus the limitations of sinful, human nature, of which Nicodemus had been reminded, are now mentioned rather to prepare the way for what God would do to supply human needs. So the irreconcilability of human nature in the person of Jew and Samaritan (iv. 9) heralds the statement concerning the " gift of God " to satisfy human needs (iv. 10). Then the mention of human wants (iv. 13) merely prepares the way for the offer by Christ in Person of " a well of water springing up into eternal life " (iv. 14). Following this comes a clearing up of ideas with reference to God, showing that the essential nature of God is Spirit, and hence that Spirit is the pre-requisite for those who desire worship or union with Him (iv. 23-4, cf. iii. 5). The whole is crowned by the self-revelation of Christ (iv. 25-6) in which He reveals Himself as the one who will show " all things " of God to man.

The preliminary bearing and influence of the first sign ends here. Our Lord, who had shown His power in changing water into a richer and higher element, used the sign to show that man also needed a change in his nature, and that man required the source of his life to be fixed " above " if he would see the Kingdom of God and obtain eternal life. He had then pointed out how this human need had been met on God's side by the gift of Christ Himself, who had come into the world to reveal to man how this change could take place.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND SIGN AT CAPERNAUM

OUR examination of the first sign at Cana has brought out the fact that by it our Lord demonstrated His power to change one substance into another, and to raise a lower element into a higher. We saw further, the application of the truths behind the sign brought out in Christ's interview with Nicodemus, who was taught that man needs to be born from above, that he needs his nature changed from a lower into a higher, and that he must have his life linked on to the life of God. We saw, moreover, how Christ pointed the way to the realisation of that new life, i.e., through Himself (iii. 15, 16), who had shown His power in the heralding sign at Cana. We now go on to examine the second sign which will show us how the " gift of God " (iv. 10) can be appropriated by man to supply his need and to secure Life.

The second great miracle chosen by St. John as a " sign " is the healing of the nobleman's son (iv. 46—54). The incident takes place once more in a district where Our Lord is well known, for the meeting of Christ with the nobleman takes place at Cana, though the son lies dying at Capernaum. The nobleman, or more literally " the king's man," was, presumably, an officer of Herod Antipas, and has been identified by some writers as Chusa, Herod's steward, whose wife Joanna afterwards ministered to Christ of her substance in gratitude for her child's restoration to health (St.

Luke viii. 3). This " king's man " from his association with the court of Herod, must have seen something of the intercourse between Herod and the Baptist, and no doubt had been influenced by the credulous atmosphere of a court whose chief was intent on seeing miracles performed (cf. St. Luke xxiii. 8). Whatever contributing influences were at work, and the first sign at Cana cannot reasonably be excluded, the fact remains that the son of the " king's man " lay *in extremis* at Capernaum, a victim of the swampy conditions of the sea port, and the father, in his hour of need, turns to Christ.

It is noticeable that the " king's man " must have had a certain degree of belief or faith in Christ, otherwise he would not have gone to Our Lord with the request to " come down and heal his son." The faith however was of a limited character, for it calls forth the reproof from Christ " except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe," and by this rebuke Our Lord seems to imply that the man's belief in Him was merely a belief in a wonder-working Christ and nothing more. Whatever limitation there might be in the man's faith, however, there was a definite belief that Our Lord was capable of something, and, in spite of Christ's rebuff, the anguished father bursts out with the cry *" Come down ere my little child die." Even yet the faith of the man is incomplete, for the impassioned cry to Christ to come down to Capernaum might imply no more than the faith a

*The route from Cana to Capernaum is a descent to the side of the lake, so there is here a touch of minute accuracy.

man might have to-day in a particular physician to cure a malady, and whose presence would accordingly be necessary at the bedside of the patient. Hence the crucial words of Christ: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." The command was important and was calculated to raise in the mind of the nobleman a deeper sense of the power of Our Lord. For Cana, where Christ was speaking, was some 25 miles from Capernaum, where the boy was lying, and hence the command of Our Lord would inevitably raise in the "king's man" profounder ideas of the Person of Christ; and, more important than all, would teach him the real meaning of faith in Christ. This particular result followed. We are told that "the man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him," and his assurance of the favourable issue of Christ's statement is so pronounced, that he doesn't hurry off at once to his boy, but puts off his return journey until the next day (iv. 52). His belief, however, is still imperfect, as he did not expect a complete recovery after Christ's statement, for when he meets his servants he asks them the hour when the boy "BEGAN to amend" (iv. 52). When he learns from his servants that at "the seventh hour of the day," the hottest moment of the twenty-four hours, when the fever was likely to be at its worst, when he knows that at this, the very moment Christ had spoken, health had come back to his son, then the "king's man" believed and his whole house (iv. 53).

The particular significance of this sign will now be apparent. In the first sign of changing the water

into wine St. John demonstrates Christ's power to change a substance of one nature into another, and the interview with Nicodemus gives the application and teaching from the sign, i.e., that man needs a new nature or new life, which is given through Christ. The second sign, whilst it shows Christ's miraculous power, shows even more forcibly than it shows Christ's superhuman power, that the new life offered by Christ can be appropriated by faith in Him. In spite of the difficulty of distance and of other attending circumstances, faith in Christ can surmount all obstacles and can secure life from Him.

CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD SIGN AT BETHESDA

THE first two miracles have shown that man needs a new source of life to change his nature from an earthly to a heavenly one, and that this change is possible through the new life offered by Christ, and in the second place that this life is appropriated by faith in Christ. The third miracle which is described in the fifth chapter carries St. John still further, for the broad truth which the healing of the impotent man is a sign of is, that human nature, even though vitiated and corrupted by sin, can also appropriate the blessing of life through faith in Christ.

Turning to St. John's narrative, we notice that the particular miracle now described by St. John is one which takes place at Jerusalem. In the case of the first two signs they had been performed amongst people who were fairly well known to Christ, and who moreover had been favourably impressed by the working of the miracles. St. John, however, for the purposes of his argument now selects a miracle performed in the Jewish capital, and in an atmosphere which was not so favourably disposed as at Cana of Galilee. The feast to which reference is made in v. 1, was, no doubt, the Feast of Purim* which commemorated the preservation of the Jews in Persia from

*The Feast of Purim was held in March, and a comparison of iv. 35 and vi. 4 leads to the assumption that this is the feast referred to here, although some commentators have suggested it may be the Feast of Pentecost or the Day of Atonement.

massacre by Haman (Esther ix.). At this feast of Purim the sick and needy were specially an object of consideration by the Jews, and therefore the healing of the impotent man takes place very appropriately at this Feast. The particular place where the miracle is performed is referred to as Bethesda, which means the House of Compassion, and the pool which went by that name is supposed to have had certain medicinal qualities which were stirred into action by the influence of a hidden spring.* Round about the pool were five porches, where the sick were placed in readiness to be lowered into the pool by their friends when the periodical rush of the spring into the pool took place. Amongst the crowd of sick people lying on rugs and pallets in the porches was one man in particular who, by the seriousness of his case, and no doubt also by the insistence of his wailings, attracted Our Lord's attention. The man in question had been paralysed for thirty-eight years and he must have been somewhat advanced in years, for the disease or weakness from which he was suffering was the direct outcome of his own sin (v. 14). To this prostrate man therefore Our Lord approaches, and accosts him with the question : " Wouldest thou be made whole ? " The query seems at first thought to be quite superfluous, but a consideration of the whole incident leads to the view that

*The site of the Pool of Bethesda has been a matter of great dispute, but the balance of opinion inclines to a pool discovered in 1888, north-west of the Church of St. Anne, near the St. Stephen's Gate.

the question of Christ was very deliberate and far from superfluous. It will be noticed, for instance, that the sick man gives no direct answer to Our Lord's question. The reply which he makes in v. 7 that " I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool ; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me," is no reply, but an evasion of the question : it is rather an attempt to justify the fact that he had been sick so long when the possibility of healing was so close at hand. Similar illustration of the character of the man is seen in what happens after the healing takes place. When he is going away from the Temple cured, he is perforce carrying the mat or pallet upon which he had been lying, and in answer to the complaints of the Jews he simply throws the responsibility upon his unknown healer (v. 10, 11). When, later on, he is met by Our Lord, who reminds him of the sin which had produced his paralysis and warns him of the consequences which continuance in sin will produce, the man is infuriated, and hurries off to the Jewish hierarchy to let them know that it was Jesus Who had healed him and ordered him to carry his bed (v. 10—16). Such base ingratitude seems to reflect the standard of the man's life, and therefore when Christ confronted him with the question whether he wanted to be restored to health, it was a direct challenge. For Our Lord saw that the man had not merely sinned, but that he was acquiescing in his sin, and in the result of it. He was not merely unashamed of his sinful action, but was no doubt turning it to his own pecuniary advantage by displaying his disease and so adopting

the role of a typical Eastern professional beggar. It probably paid him so well that he never troubled about the possibility of being restored to a normally healthy working life. With these considerations in mind we can understand more clearly the significance of Christ's question. Our Lord's query was calculated to stir the sluggish moral sense of the impotent man, and at once the man thinks of the means close at hand which might give him back his health. He has no thought of help from Christ yet; only from the waters, but "I have no man . . . . to put me into the pool" (v. 7). The despair of friendlessness was in the words, for the man was probably shunned by his fellow-sufferers as being a sinner above others, whilst his neighbours also would no doubt scorn the man who preferred disease and charity to the possession of health. But the man's mind was now set on the possibility of recovery by the question of Our Lord, and at the command of Christ "arise, take up thy bed, and walk," his mind is diverted from the pool to Christ, and with the faith which recognised in Our Lord someone more than man, he obeyed the command and "took up his bed and walked" (v. 9). For thirty-eight years the man had endured the consequences of his sin, but the recognition of mercy in the command of Christ brought new hope to him, and by an act of faith in Our Lord he stands upright, sound in body once more.

We can now appreciate the great truth which St. John wishes this miracle to convey. If the second miracle had been a sign to show how faith in Christ

procures life, this third miracle points to the even wider truth that debased human nature can secure the blessing of life. For this third miracle has presented to us in the person of the impotent man, a picture of the paralysis of sin. Yet in spite of his sin, and in spite of the moral and spiritual paralysis which resulted from his sin, the impotent man is raised from helplessness to activity, from a living death to normal life. The truth implicit in the miracle, and of which the miracle is a sign is, that man debased by sin can appropriate the blessing of life through faith in Christ.

This truth is emphasised explicitly in the narrative which immediately follows. The miracle itself brought Our Lord into opposition with the Jews because of its apparent violation of the Sabbath ; but it is significant how Our Lord in the apologia which He put forward, simply used the sign as an example of the life-giving work which He had come to do. In v. 20, for instance, the sign is referred to as one of the ἔργα or " wonders " which God Himself works : it is pointed out that the normal work of God and of Christ is to " quicken " or " make alive " (v. 21), and then the general statement is made that the knowledge of the revelation made by the Son, and belief in the Father who speaks through the Son, gives eternal life, and so enables men to pass from death to life (v. 24—26). Just as sinful humanity in the person of the impotent man had been restored, so for mankind in general there is hope of life which is eternal, through belief in Christ, and this because of Christ's association with God the Father (v. 17, 21, 26).

Humanity debased by sin, can appropriate the blessing of eternal life—such is the reading of the third sign.*

*The question was raised by some members of the Class whether the rather harsh judgment passed on the character of the impotent man was justified. In answer, it may be said with truth that parts of the narrative admit of not so severe a judgment. His reply in v. 11, for instance, might conceivably be adduced as recognising in his Healer One who had the power of over-riding the Sabbath ritual observance, and so was an implied witness to Christ. Again, his presence in the Temple (v. 14) might presuppose that he was there for the purpose of thanking God for his recovery, whilst his subsequent statement to the Jews " that it was Jesus which had made him whole " can be regarded rather as a witness to Christ. For it may be said with truth that if the man had had any malignant purpose in revealing to the Jews who his healer was, he would surely have laid emphasis upon the fact that it was Our Lord who had bade him carry his bed on the Sabbath, rather than that he should proclaim to the Jews that it was Christ Who had made him whole. Whatever modification, however, the above considerations may make in our judgment of the character of the impotent man, the broad fact still remains true that the man's sickness was the result of his own sin, and the truth which the miracle is chosen to teach remains the same.

CHAPTER V

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH SIGNS AND THEIR EXPLANATION AT CAPERNAUM

We have now reached a point in St. John's argument in which the whole human race is vitally concerned, for the enunciation of the fact that sin-stained humanity can appropriate the blessing of life through Christ, because of the latter's Divine Sonship, touches everyone of us, because of our greater or less degree of sin. And it is, moreover, this very defect on the part of humanity which raises the query how this defect can be remedied. Granted that every man needs linking with " above," granted also that God has given " the gift " of Christ, granted, moreover, that the blessing of life can be secured by faith in Him, and that even the most debased can be quickened or made alive through faith in Christ, granted all this, the further question arises quite naturally : " How is it possible for man to obtain a new source of life in Christ ; in what way can belief in Christ ' quicken,' and give eternal life ? " It is this problem which St. John proceeds to unravel.

Certain signs performed on the sick (vi. 2) and of which no particulars are given, had the effect of attracting a great multitude to the Presence of Christ.

A year had evidently passed since the events recorded in chapter v., and the disciples had passed through some varied experiences, including their first mission, and the shock of the death of the Baptist. There was need, therefore, for some enlightenment on their part from Christ on the mystery of why John the Baptist's death was permitted when the power of God had been so readily seen in their own mission (cf. St. Luke x. 17). Our Lord therefore took His disciples aside (vi. 3) in the hope of instructing them about God's methods in the world, but His intention was nullified by the approach of troops of pilgrims wending their way to Jerusalem for the Passover, and who had turned aside from their journey to seek for Christ on account of the miracles of which they had heard (vi. 2, 4). Their continued presence with Christ and His disciples in the isolated mountain area made hunger inevitable, and hence the inquiry how they were to be fed. Lack of food on the part of the people and the questioning as to the possibility of feeding them (vi. 5—9), are simply the prelude to the miracle by which Our Lord fed to repletion the 5,000 men with the five barley loaves and two fishes. The miracle is a sign, therefore, that Christ was the Divine Giver of sustenance for the support of human life. Following immediately upon this event comes the miracle—limited to the disciples—in which Our Lord walked upon the sea, overcame the violence of wind and waves, and straightway caused their boat to be " at the land whither they were going " (vi. 16—21). The miracle was comprehensive, for it showed that Christ's Presence was not limited by

sensible or material obstacles, and that His power was not conditioned by earthly things, but rather that He could utilise the world of nature for the preservation of the life of humanity.

The application or interpretation of both these signs comes in the succeeding verses.

The people who had been the participants in the miracle of the five barley loaves and the two fishes, found Christ at Capernaum and were greeted by Him with the words: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled" (vi. 26). Our Lord thus premises the elementary fact that they were attracted to Him because He had been able to satisfy their material need, and that He had thus demonstrated Himself to be the Divine Giver of sustenance for humanity. Our Lord, however, points them to a food other than material, and raises their thoughts to the spiritual plane, i.e., "work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you" (vi. 27). The questionings of the Jews with reference to "manna" and "bread from heaven" (vi. 31), showed that they understood the drift of His words, and so Our Lord became more explicit and declared that "the bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven and giveth life unto the world" (vi. 33). When the longings of their souls burst forth in the words: "Lord evermore give us this bread," then in response came the unequivocal statement: "I am the bread of life, he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never

thirst," " I am the living bread which came down out of heaven ; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever : yea, and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world " (vi. 35, 51).

In the sign vi. 5—14, Our Lord had shown that He was able to supply the material needs of men by power inherent in Himself, and that He was the Divine Giver of sustenance for daily life. The words following on the sign reveal Him as one who could give a sustenance which should be eternal in its power (vi. 50), for in some mysterious way Christ offered Himself, His " flesh," as the " living bread " for " the life of the world." It is now, however, that the significance of the fifth miracle (vi. 16—21) appears. In that miracle Our Lord had shown that His Presence was not limited by material obstacles, but rather that His Power was manifested through them. So now the same truth appears in His explanation to the Jews as to how they could feed on Him.

The first thing to bear in mind is that the Jews to whom Our Lord was speaking, in all probability had little or no difficulty in understanding the drift of Our Lord's words when He referred to Himself as " bread from heaven," and invited His hearers to feed upon Him (cf. 1 Cor. x. 1—5). Such expressions were parallel to Our Lord's other statements about " living water " (iv. 10), " a well of water springing up unto eternal life " (iv. 14), " let him come unto Me and drink " (iv. 37), and statements of this kind were part of the ordinary mysticism and symbolic teaching which was associated with the Jewish Law or Torah. The

following extracts from Rabbinical writers will illustrate this fact, i.e., Midrash Shir Rabba 1, 2, " as water refreshes the body so does the Torah refresh the soul ; " Midrash Sifre 84a, " as water gives life to the world, so do the words of Torah give life (i.e., eternal life) to the world." Bab. Talm. Shabboth 120a, refers to " the bread of the Torah " as " spiritual food." There is the further fact that the tradition was current amongst the Jews that in the Messianic era the people would feed upon Leviathan and Behemoth. Indications of this tradition are to be found in such passages as Psalm lxx. iv. 14 ; Zeph. i. 7 ; Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch xxix. 3—8.*

These references will suffice to show that the Jews were conversant with the symbolism which Our Lord was using. They were familiar with the idea of feeding upon another in the sense of drawing strength from another, and they traditionally looked upon the Law or Torah as possessing life-giving properties.

Thus we can now see that Our Lord was on clearly

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*Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch xxix. 3-8 : " . . . Then will the Messiah begin to manifest Himself, and Behemoth will show himself from his land, and Leviathan will ascend from the sea ; and these two mighty sea-monsters, whom I created on the fifth day of the work of Creation, and have reserved until that time (i.e., the Messianic era), shall then be food for all those who are left."

The idea mentioned in this quotation is no doubt a development from II. Esdras vi. 49-52, i.e., " Then didst thou preserve two living creatures, the one thou calledst Behemoth, and the other thou calledst Leviathan ; and thou didst separate the one from the other : for the seventh part, namely, where the water was gathered together, might not hold them both. Unto Behemoth thou gavest one part. . . . but unto Leviathan thou gavest the seventh part . . . and thou hast kept them to be devoured of whom thou wilt, and when."

defined ground when He invited the Jews to eat His flesh and drink His blood (vi. 54). Moreover, the Jews to whom Our Lord was speaking betrayed no surprise and difficulty at the symbolism itself. Their difficulty lay not so much in how one man could be assimilated by another, or how one man could impart his spirit to another, for that was part of current ideas as we have seen. The difficulty of the Jews, however, was how " This man " (vi. 52) " the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know " (vi. 42) could, like the Torah, become the vital principle in their lives, so that to feed upon Him was to live eternally. The difficulty, in short, was personal to Christ, and not to the enunciated idea ; it was simply the inability to understand how " this man of Nazareth, this carpenter's son," could in any way be placed parallel to the Law, or to the central figure of the Messianic era. It is for this reason therefore that Our Lord proceeds to give a revelation of the mystery of His own life. The previous statement concerning eating His flesh is first of all reiterated (vi. 53), and He goes on to demonstrate how those who eat His flesh and drink His blood secure for themselves eternal life (vi. 54—56). He then says in verse 57 that He has been sent into the world by the living God, and that the life of God is perfectly reproduced on earth in Himself ; in short, Christ is Himself God living as man. From this it results that the man who " feeds " on Christ, incorporates or brings into himself the living God, and so actually lives as Christ Himself was living (vi. 57).

Thus the symbolism which Christ uses explains itself, even apart from the traditional Jewish ideas with reference to the Torah and the Messianic era. To eat and to drink of any substance is to incorporate that substance into one's being, and so to derive strength from it. So also to believe in Christ, in the full sense of the term, is to incorporate Him, as though by eating and drinking into ourselves, and to gain for ourselves His life and His strength. For " belief," in the sense in which St. John is using the term, is not something merely mental, and it is not merely affirmation to a truth. It is rather the identification of one's self with another person's point of view, and the surrender of one's own personality to the direction and influence of another. It connotes, in short, " fellowship " of the fullest kind. " Belief " in Christ in this sense therefore marks complete fellowship with Christ, and because of Christ's fellowship with God, belief in Christ means fellowship and contact with the living God. Hence there results from fellowship with the living God through Christ, the life which flows out from God through Christ, and this is eternal life.

Thus the influence of the fourth and fifth signs is brought to a legitimate conclusion. In the former of the two, Christ had demonstrated Himself as the Divine Giver of sustenance (vi. 1—14), He had now shown that He was the Giver of Divine sustenance. In the latter of the two (vi. 16—21) He had revealed that His presence and power were not limited by material agencies, and so He had now shown that He Himself, the Giver of Divine sustenance, was capable

of being taken into the being of man, and so bringing Life from God the source of Life (vi. 57).*

*It was inevitable that the question should be raised in the Class as to whether Our Lord's discourse at Capernaum referred to the Holy Communion. The argument of the lecture shows that the discourse, and the sign of which it is an explanation, are part of a carefully arranged plan of St. John, and that they are a definite and logical step in his argument. The point he is emphasising is that Life is obtainable through belief in Christ, and he explains by reference to Our Lord's revelation of how He has come from God, how it is that a man can have Life through Christ. It seems clear, therefore, that this discourse at Capernaum does not refer to the Holy Communion, but it is equally clear that the discourse points to the same great truth to which the Holy Communion refers, viz., that Christ offers life to those who believe in Him.

CHAPTER VI

THE SIXTH SIGN

THE HEALING OF THE MAN BORN BLIND

Our examination of the last two signs showed to us, in the speech of Our Lord at Capernaum which interpreted the signs, the self-revelation by Christ of His Oneness with God, and also the capacity of man to be in communion with God through the medium of Christ. This unfolding of the manner in which the life of God Himself is offered to man, and can be appropriated by man, brought with it certain results on the part of those who heard Christ's words. There were those, for instance, who up to this time had been numbered amongst the general body of those following Christ as their Teacher, but who could not now accept the claim of Christ's union with God, and they " walked no more with Him " (vi. 66). Then again, the twelve disciples through the lips of St. Peter are shown to have arrived at a fuller belief in Our Lord, for He is now referred to as " the Holy One of God," and One Who " had words bringing eternal life " (vi. 68—69). This belief on the part of " the Twelve " is by no means the full and complete belief of later days, but it is an affirmation of the truth that Christ is in some unique way associated with God, and also an acknowledgment of Christ's association with that which is eternal. The first great sign at Cana had given them complete trust in Christ Himself before Our Lord had given expression to any teaching ; now

they had been carried to a belief in the unique position which Christ held with God, and also to a belief in the God-given message of Christ. A third class of people affected by the signs are those referred to as "the Jews," who are now committed to a policy of active opposition (vii. 1). The term "Jews" in this reference, as in such verses as i. 19, ii. 18, v. 18, connotes the Pharisees and the hierarchy generally. They had heard with wondering incredulity the testimony of the Baptist (i. 20) and the cryptic answer of Christ (ii. 18—22) to their preliminary inquiries, and they had noted the rising volume of teaching associated with the later signs. But a claim for acknowledgment, which cut across their own ritual observance (v. 18), nullified any effect which the signs themselves might have had, and the further development of Christ's teaching enunciating that He was the medium for giving the Life of God to man, merely hardened a caste-encrusted prejudice into a deliberate policy of getting rid of the offender by murder (vii. 1).

In addition to these three classes of people, however, there remained another considerable body, whose opinions were obviously in a state of flux. Many of them had taken the lower ground of affirming that Christ was a good man (vii. 12); others had considered Our Lord to be the Christ (vii. 41); some thought He MIGHT BE the Christ (vii. 25—27); whilst others, again, believed He was the long-expected prophet (vii. 41). Though not a perfect belief, it yet approximated to the belief described in ii. 23 as "believing on His Name," and was capable of being

raised to a completer form of belief, as vii. 31 seems to imply.

It was in answer to these cross-currents of feeling amongst the Jews, and to meet the hesitancy of those described above, that Our Lord lays down the need for experimental knowledge if they would learn the truth of that to which He had given utterance : " If any man willeth to do His will he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God or not " (vii. 17). When by the influence of the miracles they had been brought to the point where they were favourably inclined to consider the teaching which accompanied the miracles, and of which the miracles themselves were signs, there remained the test of practical experience to prove that the words of Christ satisfied the inner consciousness of man. But it is insistent that a man shall " will " to act in accordance with the invitation of Christ, that he shall " come " (vii. 37) unto Christ. When the manward side has been performed then the Godward result will be made clear. This point of view is developed further by Our Lord when He renews the acquaintance of His hearers and declares : " I am the Light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life " (viii. 12). In other words, He would say that just as darkness is not dispelled and driven away by any mechanical process, but merely by kindling a light, so in much the same way life is created within us simply by admitting Him who is the source of Life. To the difficulties raised by the Jews, Christ replies by referring them to the limitations of their own know-

ledge and position (viii. 14, 15, 23), and on the other hand to the fact that Life is absolute in Himself. He declares " He that sent Me is with Me " (viii. 29), " I came forth and am come from God " (viii. 42), and because of this relationship with God therefore " before Abraham was, I am." Life is, in consequence absolute and timeless in Christ, a fact which carries with it the result that " if a man keep His Word," the light from Christ will so illumine his being that he will know the meaning of absolute truth, and of absolute freedom, both moral and spiritual (viii. 32), and that in consequence he shall never see death (viii. 51).

The appeal to put Our Lord's words to the test resulted in the raising of a considerable body of the multitude to the position of " believing on Him " in the fullest sense (viii. 30) ; whilst others still occupied the lower ground of " believing Him " (viii. 31) to the extent that they believed Christ's words had the ring of truth about them. They refused, however, the appeal to put Christ's words to the test (viii. 31), and hence, so far from advancing to the fuller belief in Christ, they slipped back into the obscurantism in which the hierarchy was now found (viii. 44), and ultimately found themselves in the contradictory position of disbelieving Him Whom they had previously believed (cf. viii. 31, 45). It was but a short step, therefore, from personal abuse to personal violence, and the Jewish religious leaders could henceforth count on the support of those whose incipient faith had been atrophied by the refusal to test by experience

the truths of Christ, truths to which they had previously given a certain credence through the evidence of the signs.

The position now taken up by Our Lord of demanding belief in Himself and His words through the signs, and the open invitation to put Him and His words to the test of experience, accounts for the fact that St. John at this stage introduces the sixth sign of the healing of the man born blind (ix. 1—12). The significant feature of this miracle is the way in which Our Lord forces the man to take part in his own cure. Moreover, the miracle itself is peculiar on account of the elaborate preparations made by Our Lord, and also because of the consecutive steps in the performance of the miracle (cf. the spittle, the clay, the anointing, the command to go to Siloam—ix. 6. 7), both of which aspects are in marked contrast to the spontaneity and directness of the previous miracles. The great point is that the man himself, notwithstanding his own helplessness, had to take his part in the work of healing. Christ had acted on the man, and the deliberateness of His procedure, already mentioned, served to mark the difficulty encountered by Christ in bringing the Light of Life to those whose minds were darkened. But the blind man had to act as well, both in going to Siloam and in washing there. It was his own active faith which prompted the man to take Our Lord at His Word, with the result that he "came seeing."

The application of the sign is apparent in the narrative which follows the miracle. Taking the case

of the Pharisees first; we see that they refuse the invitation of Christ to put Him and His words to the test. On the contrary, they take up first of all the perilous ground that a good deed must have been performed by one who is ungodly, because it contravenes the ritual of Sabbath observance (ix. 16). They then attempt to escape from an impossible position by trying to deny the performance of the miracle altogether (ix. 18). When this fails, they return to the charge of wickedness associated with one who is a Sabbath-breaker (ix. 24), and finally dismiss the matter on the ground that they are unaware of Christ's origin (ix. 29). So far, therefore, from putting Christ to the test of experience, they attempt to reject the evidence placed before them, and wilfully blind themselves to facts in order to escape from unpalatable truths. Hence the scathing denunciation by Christ of those who, gifted with sight, wilfully blind themselves and refuse to see (ix. 39, 41), for it is not only a refusal to test Christ's claims, but also a refusal to accept the evidence upon which the claim is based.

The case of the healed man, however, is far otherwise, for he had clearly learned the lesson of the sign. He starts first of all with the assumption that no sinner could perform such a sign as that which has been worked in his case (ix. 16). He has no knowledge of Christ for he has never seen Him, but has only heard His voice. Yet, when pressed by the Pharisees, he feels that Christ is no ordinary man, and must be at least a prophet (ix. 17). When the threat of excommunication was being brought forward in intimidation (ix. 22), the man takes his stand on his own

experience (ix. 25), and states his conviction that Christ must at least have come from God (ix. 33). Finally, the healed man comes once more into the presence of Christ, and the honesty of his mind makes him responsive to Christ's leading (ix. 35). The ultimate result, therefore, is the healed man's complete belief in the vast claim by Our Lord concerning Himself (ix. 35, 38).* The progressive nature of the healed man's position was simply due to the logical application of the sign and its implications, to his own thoughts about Christ, and this brought him finally to the position of full belief.

The sign, therefore, illustrates the great truth which Our Lord was wishing to emphasise. It was experimental faith which brought the healed man into such a relationship to Christ, that the light of the knowledge of Christ dispelled the darkness of ignorance, and brought him into close personal relationship of belief in Christ, who is Life.

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*ix. 38 Declares that the healed man " worshipped Him," and the verb used προσεκύνησεν always implies Divine worship. The same verb occurs in iv. 20-24.

CHAPTER VII

THE SEVENTH SIGN—THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

We have been examining the Gospel to see how St. John has arranged his selected miracles for the purpose of producing belief in Christ as the Son of God, and of securing life thereby. Step by step the narrative has led us, showing how Our Lord, by means of the miracles and of the truths of which they were signs, was leading His hearers into the full light of belief in Himself. The influence of the signs, however, had been negative, as well as positive. On the one hand, there had been a gradual process of development in the minds of the disciples, even though the full and perfect belief had not yet come ; but, on the other hand, there was an equally clear development of disbelief. The climax had come by the end of the ninth chapter, when the leaders of the Jews had wilfully blinded themselves to the evidence which Our Lord was placing before them. It was not merely a refusal to obey Christ's request for experimental test, so as to realise for themselves that He was the Light and Life of men ; it was not merely a refusal to give credence to Christ's teaching, but it was a rigid determination to refuse consideration to any evidence which could be adduced in support of Our Lord's claims (ix. 39, 41). Blind hostility could go no further than this, and as was inevitable, it raised an impassable breach between them and the influence of

Christ. Nothing now can be hoped for from such men in the way of impartial consideration of the signs and words offered by Christ. Hence occurs for the first time the note of separation, and a definite rift is seen in the position taken up by Christ in reference to the leaders of the Jews (ch. x.). Our Lord still offers Himself as the Life of the world (x. 16), but if the world in the persons of the Jewish hierarchy will not accept Him, then He must concentrate on those who will listen, and teach them that in Him they may have eternal life (x. 3). This is the line of thought which runs through the tenth chapter. Christ declares that He is the shepherd and leader of the Jewish people (x. 4, 14). He offers them an entrance through Himself into a fold of safety (x. 9), and states that His purpose is to give them life and to preserve it continually (x. 10, 11). Christ appeals to His hearers, therefore, to turn from their so-called leaders, who are leading merely for their own interests, and whose leading means spiritual death (x. 10), to Himself, who can give them life, and who will guard that life eternally (x. 10, 27).

This statement of Christ proclaiming the fact that He recognised the incompatibility of the attitude of the Jewish leaders with His own offers and claims, did not cause the immediate rupture that might have been expected, and the reason lay in the lingering doubt still existing amongst those leaders as to the possibility of there being some truth in Christ's claims (x. 21, 24). But when they crowd round Our Lord in Solomon's Porch and demand a plain answer

to their direct question about Himself (x. 22, 24), they receive a very significant answer. They are reminded, first of all, that they had heard the " words " of Christ with reference to Himself, and that they had refused credence to the words (x. 25). They are told that the " words " had been buttressed by the "works" which had been specially performed to reveal Christ's Divine origin (x. 25, 37, 38). But they had shut out for themselves the evidence of the signs and the accompanying truths which Christ proclaimed, and their attempt at personal violence (x. 31, 39) was the logical sequel to their obscurantist attitude. The possibility of any kind of rapprochement between Christ and the Jewish leaders was now out of the question, for the signs had failed, so far as they were concerned.

Whilst, however, the Jewish leaders and their devotees had descended to blasphemous abuse and personal violence (x. 20, 21, 31, 39), there were many Jews, even apart from the disciples, who had a certain belief in Christ (x. 41, 42), and therefore, the last and greatest of all the signs was meant for two classes of people who had been in attendance upon Our Lord. It was meant, first of all, for the disciples (xi. 15), and then for the multitude (xi. 41, 42). In the case of the disciples, the purpose of the sign was to round off and complete their faith, which had been gradually growing. At Cana they had seen the demonstration of Christ's power over the world of nature, and the interview with Nicodemus had revealed the necessity for a change of nature on the part of humanity, and the

need for birth "from above," and God's offer to supply it through Christ. Then in the healing of the son of the "king's man," they had learned that faith in Christ was necessary to secure this new life offered by God; and, further, by the sign performed on the impotent man, they were taught that even debased, sinful humanity could by faith appropriate the offered gift. This again, had been followed by the fourth and fifth signs revealing Christ's Oneness with God, and because of it being able to give Divine sustenance which could be assimilated by every individual. Then the healing of the blind man and the application of the sign showed that experimentalism alone will reveal the illuminating and life-giving power of Christ. But there was still a limitation even in the belief of the Twelve, and therefore, for the sake of the disciples and of those who still continued to follow Christ, the great sign is performed before the tomb of Lazarus. Just as in the first sign at Cana, Our Lord had shown His power over the world of nature, so now in the closing sign He will demonstrate the same power over human nature, and thus clinch His claim to be the Author and Giver of Life, ere He closes His public revelation.

It is noticeable at the outset how Our Lord implicitly infers that He has the power of Life and Death. In xi. 14, 15 He declares that Lazarus is dead, and that He is glad for the sake of the disciples that He was not present in answer to the appeal of the sisters (xi. 3). Had He been present He could have prevented the death of His friend; but His absence

was deliberate. His delay was not due to the needs of the multitude, to whom He was ministering, though this may seem a contributory element (x. 40—42), but rather that the disciples might believe (xi. 15), and that the Son of God should be glorified (xi. 4).

The remarks of Our Lord reveal that there was still a limitation in the belief even on the part of the disciples, a limitation which precluded the Son of God being glorified, and which, moreover, hindered their possession of eternal life. It is true that they did believe in Him in a certain sense. It is recorded for example in ii. 11 that " the disciples believed on Him," which expressed personal trust, at all events ; and again, in vi. 69, St. Peter goes so far as to say that Christ has " words of eternal life," and that He is " the Holy One of God." How far this belief was from the full acceptance of Christ as One with God the source of Life, and because of it giving Life Himself, is obvious, and is further demonstrated by the dialogue with Martha. The latter believes that in some way Christ had power over death and could even give life, " if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died " (xi. 21). The words which follow show very clearly how imperfect her belief was however, i.e., " even now I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it Thee." It was something to realise that she had the belief that Christ could in some way secure from God the miraculous boon of life for her dead brother, but the form of expression showed that she had not grasped the fact that Life was possible from Christ Himself.

To her it was simply that Christ could, like a favoured prophet of old, obtain His request from God—a request however, for which He must beg, just as ordinary men must beg.* So again her words in xi. 24 merely point to the general Pharisaic belief in a future resurrection, and there was no identification of her belief in Eternal Life with the person of Christ. Hence Our Lord directs her hope of life for the dead Lazarus to be obtained from God, and her general belief in a future resurrection, to a belief primarily in His own Person, i.e., " I am the Resurrection and the Life : he that believeth on Me though He die yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die."

Martha had been cherishing a truth somewhat as a dogma. Christ asks her to cut herself loose from dogmas and focus her belief upon Himself ; it is a request from Our Lord that she shall cut herself loose from all ideas, and focus attention upon Himself, and

*The Greek text brings this point out clearly. The Greek verb used in xi. 22 is ἀιτέω and the English idea embodied in it is " to ask " in the sense of " to crave for." In other words it implies " a suppliant," or one who is dependent on the other to whom the request is made. The same verb is used in xiv. 13 ; xv. 16 ; xvi. 23. In these latter cases the verb is used correctly, because it refers to the disciples " asking " or " making supplication " or " craving for " certain things from the Father or Christ. In xvi. 26, where Our Lord Himself speaks of " asking the Father " or " praying the Father for you," the verb used is ἐρωτάω which means " to interrogate " or " make request of," and gives no idea of dependence. This same verse (xvi. 26) illustrates the difference in the two verbs. Christ says to His disciples : " In that day ye shall ask in My name . . ." and He uses the verb ἀιτέω when the reference is to the disciples asking in His name, but when He Himself " prays the Father " the verb is ἐρωτάω

upon the fact that life is given to all who believe in Him. It is in answer to this statement that we get the great confession. " I have believed that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even He that cometh into the world " (xi. 27). Our Lord had thus become for Martha " the Christ," the fulfilment of the promises to Israel, He was now in her eyes " the Son of God,"* the completion of all divine revelation, He was the one " that cometh into the world," the expectation and salvation of the human race. Here, then, was a firm belief in Christ as the link between God and man.

Even yet, however, the faith of Martha was not full and complete as xi. 39 clearly shows. She obviously held the current Jewish belief that the spirit departed from the dead on the third day after death, and that corruption therefore set in on this day, and this belief was evidently stronger than her belief in Christ.† The purpose of the seventh sign, therefore, was to raise faith to its proper level, i e., to faith in Christ personally as the Author and Giver of Life. He who raised the dead and gave back life to the dead body, surely He is the Author of Life, One with God the source of life, and able to give life to those who believe in Him.

Here, therefore, the signs cease, for the perfect

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*See note p. 6 above on the expression " Son of God."

†" It was the common Jewish idea that corruption commenced on the fourth day, that the drop of gall, which had fallen from the sword of the Angel and caused death, was then working its effect, and that, as the face changed, the soul took its final leave from the resting-place of the body " (Edersheim ii. 324).

number seven marked the perfect sign which fully revealed Christ as the Lord of Life. All the signs had in some way revealed Christ's power over nature, both animate and inanimate, and the discourses connected therewith had been used to make clear the truth, how man could gain life for himself by belief in Christ. So before the tomb of Lazarus an ocular demonstration was given that Our Lord had within Him the power to give Life, a sign which carried with it the necessary corollary that He could give Life to all who " believed in " or " had fellowship " with Him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE UPPER ROOM TEACHING

FOLLOWING on the performance of the great sign in the restoring to life of Lazarus,,we notice that with this sign the public revelation of Christ as the Giver of Life through belief in Himself as the Son of God, draws to a close. For the disciples there now results a closer association still with Our Lord (xi. 54), an association which is to be even more closely cemented by the discourses of the Upper Room. Besides the disciples however, the great sign had its influence on the multitude (xi. 41, 42) who evidently had believed in Christ in the lower sense of a wonder-worker, owing to the evidence of the sixth sign (xi. 37). Many of these now believed on Him in the fuller sense (xi. 45), whilst there was a continual secession of Jews from the ranks of those who followed the hierarchy, into the ranks of those who fully believed in Christ (xii. 11, 17, 18). On the other hand, there were those among the multitude who were too closely tainted with the obscurantist spirit of the hierarchy to be influenced even by the seventh great sign, and who speedily went to acquaint their spiritual chiefs with the details of the sign and its results among the people (xi. 46). Even in the face of this stupendous sign the Pharisees not merely refuse credence, but go to the extreme of openly arranging to put Christ to death (xi. 48—53, 57), and their very vehemence prevents some would-be followers of Christ amongst their own body from

advancing further into the knowledge of Christ (xii. 42). The whole attitude of the Pharisees towards the signs and words is summed up by St. John in the prophecy of Isaiah. The latter had foretold such a people whose spiritual eye would be blinded by prejudice, and whose heart would be hardened against receiving new truths ; so that they would render themselves incapable of testing such evidence as Christ offered them, owing to their own insular prejudice (xii. 37-41). Hence, before Our Lord withdraws from the public gaze He proclaims His final public message, to which His signs and teaching had been pointing. He declares that belief on Himself implies belief in God, and that this belief brings the Light of God and the Life of God to sinful humanity (xii. 46, 50). On the other hand, those who, like the Pharisees, do not believe the words of Christ which have been attested by the signs, are to be judged by those same words, for if they will not hear them now in this world they will stand condemned by those words in the Day of Judgment (xii. 48).

From this point the public revelation of Christ ceases, and St. John now confines his narrative to the way in which the disciples were enlightened as to the true significance of their faith in Christ. Our Lord had already enunciated in His closing words to the Jews the principle of self-sacrifice by which He will be able to accomplish for men the life which He promises (xii. 24, 25), a statement which brought with it a divine attestation (xii. 28). In the narrower circle of the disciples this principle of self-sacrifice is made more explicit by the washing of the disciples' feet

(xiii. 1—12), and by insistence on the same spirit on the part of the disciples themselves (xiii. 12—14). The practical bearing of the section upon the general question is clear. Christ had by the seven great signs shown that He was the Lord of Life, and that " in Him was Life " for men. The influence of the signs had culminated in showing that faith in the person of Christ was the pre-requisite to the possession of life. This truth, however, carried with it the difficulty that Christ could not always be bodily present to kindle faith in Himself, or to develop the faith of would-be disciples. So now Our Lord shows how this difficulty is to be overcome. It is by the sacrifice of Himself (xii. 24, 25). When He is lifted up out of the earth He will be able to draw all men, irrespective of race or time, unto Himself as the Giver of Life (xii. 32), and thus the Son of Man and God Himself will be glorified when the means of life is procured for all mankind (xiii. 31-32).

This statement of Christ was obviously not fully comprehended by the disciples, as the remarks of Simon Peter reveal (xiii. 36—38). The note of personal separation which Our Lord had struck (xiii. 33, 36) gave no light to them concerning the great problem of how life was to be possible for the whole world through belief in Him. Hence there now follow the Upper Room discourses in order to make clear to the disciples that " independent of physical presence or absence He will have in Himself for them (and for all men) life's inexhaustible supply."

The opening words used by Our Lord in the Upper

Room discourse at once point the disciples to the profound truth which He desires to impress upon them, for in xiv. 1—6 He tells them that it is not in Heaven at some future date they were to find God and Eternal Life, but rather that through God in Christ they were to find Heaven and Eternal Life now. This fact is summed up in xiv. 6, "I am the Way" to the Father, declares Christ, the means by which two worlds are united and by which men may pass from the one world to the other. "I am the Truth," in whom is revealed all that is eternal and absolute about God and Heaven; and because I am the Way and the Truth "I am the Life." Through Me, He says in effect, you have the open sight of God, and therefore "because I live ye shall live also" (xiv. 19).

The significance of these opening words is unfolded in the section which introduces the simile of the vine and the branches. The disciples are now told that their life of union with Christ had begun, but was not yet perfected (xv. 1, 2). This unity with Christ had already had a beneficial result for the disciples (xv. 3), but its full purport would only be realised as they maintained their union with Christ (xv. 7, 10). Yet the very necessity of maintaining this union with Christ brought with it the further necessity of Christ's departure. This had already been hinted at (vii. 33, 34) and is now made quite plain. It was clear that the bodily presence of Christ was limited both as to time and as to space. The bodily presence of Christ had been the means of shewing the disciples by His signs the Way to God, the Truth of God, and the Life of God;

but what of the time when the bodily presence of Christ was no more, and what of the people of that and of subsequent ages for whom the bodily presence of Christ was an impossibility? So therefore Our Lord proceeds to teach His disciples that the absence of His bodily presence was essential in order to leave the way open for a new relationship by which His universal presence could be realised. This universal presence was to be realised through the agency of "another advocate," and this "advocate" was none other than the presence of Christ Himself in Spirit after His bodily departure had come about (xiv. 18, 26; xvi. 7). The Spirit of God and of Christ was to be "called to the side"* of men, to guide them into the truth of all that which Christ had been teaching (xiv. 17, 26; xvi. 13). Christ had come from the presence of God, as He had stated before; He was now returning to the Father in Heaven (xvi. 28), but the Holy Spirit Who was already abiding in them (xiv. 17)† would make manifest what Christ had taught, i.e., that there was Life for those who believed in Him.

One notices incidentally from xvi. 30 how even yet there was a certain limitation in the belief of the disciples (cf. also xiv. 8, 9), but it was a distinct advance when they declared their solemn belief that Christ

*The word translated in the R.V. as "the Comforter" is the Greek word παράκλητον of which the English equivalent is Paraclete. The literal meaning is "one called to the side of" another, i.e., as an advocate, or guide, or helper.

†The usually accepted text of xiv. 17 runs "He abideth with you, and SHALL be in you," but there is strong support for the reading "He abideth with you, and IS in you."

" came forth from God." They had a definite belief now in the person of Christ who came from the presence of God. Our Lord therefore takes up this confession of faith, and proceeds to show how their belief in His person could be maintained even in His absence. He had repeatedly revealed the union of the Father and Himself. He had also revealed the mystical union between Himself and those who believed in Him (xv.). Since they now believed in Him as one Who " came forth from God," there followed the necessary consequence, viz., the mystical union between Father, Christ, and believers in Christ, the certainty of which is secured and made known to the believers by the Paraclete.

Therefore, from one point of view, the purpose of St. John's Gospel, as explained in ch. xx. 30, 31, reaches a climax when Our Lord declares " this is life eternal that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ " (xvii. 3). St. John had set out with the definite purpose of describing certain miracles, in the hope that the miracles as signs of Christ's power, and their extension, so to speak, in their spiritual application, would produce a belief in Christ's Oneness with God, which would ensure eternal life. And now this belief or knowledge had come to the disciples in the Upper Room, and with that " knowledge " the possession of eternal life was theirs. For these disciples did not regard belief or knowledge as a matter of intellect only ; or, as something which was concerned merely with ideas, without any relationship to life or

conduct, as Greek thinkers did. Rather, as typical Jews, they understood perfectly that the " belief " or " knowledge " to which Christ referred was that which controlled the whole personality of the one who " believed " or " knew." For the " knowledge " spoken of is not simply verbal or mental, it rather denotes the perfect intuition which one person has of another ; it is the perfect understanding which follows " belief," and it involves the complete control of the " believer " by the one in whom he believes. Therefore, " to know " the only true God is in a sense to be one with God, and " to know " Christ, to feel His Spirit always influencing them, was to make the disciples one with Christ and with God who sent Him ; and so the prayer of Christ would become true " that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us " (xvii. 21). Yet this could only be realised by the disciples when the Spirit gave to them that perfect " knowledge " of God which they needed (cf. xiv. 26, 21, 23), and to bring this consummation about Christ was to change His mode of being that through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the disciples, and through them all the world, " might know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He did send."

CHAPTER IX

THE UPPER ROOM CONFESSION

THE close of Our Lord's discourse in the Upper Room brought the disciples to the grim method by which He was to pass to His Kingdom in the hearts of men, yet even in the bewildering strangeness of the Passion after the Upper Room they would still discern some patent facts. They would note the voluntariness of Christ's sufferings, and that He went forward to the Cross in fulfilment of the principle of self-sacrifice which He had previously signified in word (xii. 24, 25) and in deed (xiii. 1-10) (cf. xviii. 4, 6, 11 ; xix. 28). They would also see clear evidence of the definiteness with which Christ was moving to the realisation of His universal presence for man in the references to His Kingdom (xviii. 36), and to the absolute " truth " which His followers should know (xviii. 37). They would see the same fact in the appeal to the inner consciousness of the Roman Governor (xviii. 37, 38 ; cf. vii. 17). But in the awful tragedy which seemed to crush out the hope, new-born in men, of knowing God, there occurred the strange phenomenon which so keenly arrested the attention of St. John. When the soldier pierced the side of Christ " and straightway there came out blood and water " (xix. 34), it was the sign of Life in death to St. John, for in some mysterious sense it showed the permanence of Christ's life even in death.

It is in consequence of this that there are penned the words which tell of the growing perception of the deeper truth now being learned, i.e., " and he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true ; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe " (xix. 35). It needed but the evidence of the empty tomb to bring St. John himself to a true knowledge of that to which the signs and the Upper Room discourses had been pointing, and of which " the blood and water " was a token, viz., the absoluteness of Life in the person of Christ. So now " he saw and believed," even before he had seen the risen Christ (xx. 8). That which to the unenlightened mind would have brought despair, was to him the key that unlocked all previous mysteries concerning life in Christ—the work of the Paraclete had begun (cf. also ii. 22 ; xii. 16).

In order to emphasise and clarify the conception which St. John now had, there are introduced the incidents connected with Our Lord's post-Resurrection Presence. It is significant how in the interview with Mary (xx. 14—17) Our Lord rejects her " physical " touch (xx. 17), because the time for such had gone with the Resurrection. But the spiritual contact has begun in its stead, for " I am ascending unto My Father and your Father, and My God and your God " (xx. 17). The spiritualised body of Christ was returning to the presence of the Father from whence He came, the continuous and eternal life of Christ was departing to where He had " been in the beginning with God." Before that event took place, however, there occurred the scene in the Upper Room (xx. 19—23)

in which the dual aspect, Godward and manward, was again revealed, to show how the Life of God could be obtained by man. Our Lord first of all " breathed on them " (xx. 22), thus associating His disciples with His absolute life as the Risen One, and making them, by this symbolic act (cf. Gen. ii. 7) sharers in His glorified Life, which was now ascending to God. Yet at the same time came the command : " Take ye the Holy Spirit,"* the personal action of the individual was necessary, because passivity has no place in realising the presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ. Paradoxical though it sounded, it was necessary to " take " in order to " receive " the Divine Presence which the Spirit of Christ makes real to men.

With this pledge of the contact of the " spiritualised life " of Christ with those who believed on Him, the work of St. John draws to a close. But before the Ascension—spoken of as already TAKING PLACE owing to the spiritual state of Christ's Risen Body (xx. 17)—was really consummated, it was needful that the influence of the signs should have its ultimate purpose completely realised. Not once throughout the Gospel had Our Lord spoken of Himself directly as God. The Evangelist had declared his own faith in Christ as God, at the outset of the Gospel, and Christ had frequently referred to God as His Father and to His union with God ; but not once had He declared Himself God. Now, however, in the interview with Thomas comes the full confession towards which the

*The Greek word is λάβετε which means " to take," and is used repeatedly in the Gospel cf x. 17, 18 ; xiii. 4 ; xvi. 15.

signs had been tending. The victory over death by the Resurrection, the proof of omniscience in knowing the thoughts of the absent disciple, and the sign of omnipotence in the " breathing forth " of the Holy Spirit the week previous, were sufficient to bring Thomas to the full realisation of the Divinity of Christ. No longer is it " Rabbi " or " Master," as in the former days, but full and absolute comes the confession " My Lord and my God " (xx. 28).

It is here therefore that St. John draws to a conclusion and inscribes the purpose of his writing (xx. 31). When the disciple had given expression to his faith in the person of Christ as God, in that confession and faith lay the fact of his own posesssion of eternal life through being linked on to the life of God Himself. Thomas only symbolised in his own person what is inherent in all mankind, viz., that they have the competency (i. 12) through faith in Christ—in Whom, by the influence of the Paraclete, they may believe though they have not seen Him (xx.29)—to become sons of God and heirs of everlasting life. In the Upper Room the disciples, through Thomas, showed they had at length learned that " God became man, that man might become God," and that man might thus be partaker of the Life which flows out from God Himself.

Roffey & Clark, Printers, Croydon.